NO. 5

ONI PRESS

SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS

DANIEL ZIEGLER

NICK CAGNETTI

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ELIZABETH!
IT'S ME... IT'S HELENA.
MY SISTER?
NO... YOU CAN'T BE...
DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME?
ONLY THAT YOU EXISTED.
I ALWAYS IMAGINED MY SISTER TO BE KIND AND BEAUTIFUL.
NOT THIS.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, I'M DOING THIS FOR YOU.
HE'S THE ONE WHO MURDERED YOU!
WHO BROUGHT PAIN TO SO MANY IN THIS WORLD.
I KNOW. AND IT'S A BURDEN HE HAS CARRIED EVEN INTO THE AFTERLIFE.
ARE YOU PREPARED TO CARRY THE SAME?
IT'S NOT THE SAME, HE'S A MONSTER!
AND YOUR MASTER OVER THERE IS WHO MADE HIM THAT WAY.
SPARE ME! YOU'RE EITHER A MONSTER OR YOU'RE NOT.
ERIK IS WHO HE ALWAYS WAS.
EVEN WHEN HE DIDN'T REMEMBER WHO HE WAS, HE SAVED ME.
KEPT ME COMPANY. KEPT ME SAFE.
THAT'S NO MONSTER.
HIS VICTIMS WILL NEVER KNOW PEACE AS LONG AS HE'S AROUND.
NOW FINISH THIS AT ONCE!
HE'S RIGHT...

...HE DOESN'T DESERVE TO EXIST!

WHO ARE YOU TO MAKE THAT CHOICE?!

A SISTER WHO *LOVES* YOU.

IF YOU DO THIS, YOU ARE *NO SISTER* OF MINE.

HUSH! IT'S ALMOST DONE!

LEAVE HER OUT OF THIS!

THEN FINISH THE *SPELL!*

I CAN'T.

FUMP.

WHUMP!

LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

WAIT! WHAT HAPPENED?!

WHERE DID SHE GO?!

CRASH

BACK TO THE *SPIRIT REALM,* I HOPE.

IT SEEMS THE CONVERGENCE WAS TIED TO THE *HAT'S MAGIC.*

I DIDN'T EVEN GET TO SAY *GOODBYE.*

SHE WAS RIGHT HERE. I COULD HAVE FINALLY HAD MY *CLOSURE.*

RETURN ME TO *DEATH* AS I WAS BEFORE AND I WILL RELAY YOUR MESSAGE.

IF THAT IS YOUR WISH.

I MAY NEVER UNDERSTAND IT. BUT IF ELIZABETH *TRUSTS* YOU AND YOU'RE *GENUINE...*

...PROMISE ME YOU'LL *TAKE CARE* OF HER.

YOU HAVE MY *WORD.*

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR ME TO *BRING HIM BACK.*

NO.

YOU'VE SEEN WHAT MEDDLING WITH *NATURE* HAS BROUGHT US.

HE'S ALREADY BEGUN HIS *JOURNEY* ON THE OTHER SIDE.

ELIZABETH!

BACK OFF, CREATURE!

LORD LAEMMLE?!

TAKE A GOOD LOOK. THIS IS THE FATE YOU DOOMED ME TO.

AND IT'S A *FATE* WE'LL SOON SHARE.

BECAUSE IT'S WHAT WE BOTH *DESERVE.*

COME BACK HERE! YOU CAN'T JUST WALK AWAY!

YOU *SAVED ME* AGAIN.

AT LEAST I'M **USEFUL** FOR ONE THING. AFTER ALL, **YOU'RE** THE ONLY REASON I STILL **EXIST.**

YOU DIDN'T MEAN WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT YOUR FATE, DID YOU?

WITH ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, YOU SHOULD KNOW **BETTER** THAN ANYONE.

THERE'S **NO HOPE** FOR ME AT THAT **JUDGMENT HALL.**

BUT I HAVE YOUR BOOK RIGHT HERE...

...AND **LOOK!** THOSE MUST BE THE **LAST PAGES!**

ELIZABETH! WAIT!

WHERE IS THIS TRANSPORT HEADED?

TO THE **JUDGMENT HALL.**

SNATCH!

PERFECT! LET'S GO!

WAIT...

...ELIZABETH, PLEASE.

I DON'T NEED A BOOK ANYMORE TO UNDERSTAND THE **WEIGHT** OF MY ACTIONS.

JUST **GIVE IT UP.**

IT MAY NOT MATTER TO YOU...

...BUT I MUST KNOW HOW YOUR STORY **ENDED.**

ERIK, PLEASE! I CAN'T *BEAR* ANOTHER.

THEN I'LL DO IT MYSELF!

PUSH!

WHAT THE DEVIL?!

STOP! STOP THESE HORRORS!

MY LOVE?

I'M WAITING. COME TO ME. IT'S THE *ONLY* WAY.

SHE WANTS ME TO *JOIN* HER IN THE *AFTERLIFE.*

SHE CAN NEVER *LIVE.* BUT I CAN NEVER *DIE.*

IF YOU STOP THE MAINTENANCE, YOUR PHYSICAL STATE WILL *DETERIORATE.*

BUT I DON'T BELIEVE YOU WILL EVER *DIE.*

IF GIVEN TIME I MAY BE ABLE TO PRODUCE A *SERUM* TO RETURN YOUR *MORTALITY.*

DO IT!

AND WHAT ABOUT THE GIRL?

LET HER *GO.* THERE'S ONLY ONE EXPERIMENT THAT *MATTERS* NOW.

LAEMMLE WAS RIGHT...

...THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS *TIME.*

WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT OF BED?!

I HAD TO SEE WHAT I'VE DONE.

EVERY DAY WITHOUT MAINTENANCE IS LIKE A *FOG* BEING LIFTED.

AND THESE ARE THE *HORRORS* BENEATH.

ENDLESS HORRORS.

LET'S GET YOU BACK...

...BEFORE YOU *LOSE* WHAT REMAINS OF YOUR *MOTOR FUNCTIONS.*

POFF

I BELIEVE THIS SERUM SHOULD FULFILL YOUR REQUEST.

IF NOT, I'LL CONTINUE TRYING.

DOCTOR, I FEEL LIKE I'M SPLITTING APART.

I WANT SO BADLY TO BE *HAPPY* AGAIN BUT I KNOW THAT ISN'T WHAT I *DESERVE.*

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S *WAITING* FOR YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE.

BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

EVERYONE ELSE CAN DECIDE WHAT THEY THINK YOU DESERVE.

ALL YOU CAN DECIDE IS WHAT YOU'LL DO *NOW.*

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I'M TRULY *SORRY* FOR MY PART IN THIS.

GOODBYE, DOCTOR.

AND THEN YOU ARRIVED HERE.

WHAT YOU DID WAS ***TERRIBLE,*** BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART.

I'M NOT SURE THAT MATTERS TO THE ***REALMKEEPERS.***

YOUR CHANCES MAY BE ***SLIM,*** BUT YOU HAVE TO TRY.

IF NOT FOR YOURSELF, FOR SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT.

FOR ***KATRINA.***

PERHAPS YOU'RE ***RIGHT*** ABOUT THAT...

WHAT'S WRONG?

IT'S JUST... I'VE BEEN SO USED TO THE ***MONOTONY*** OF IT ALL.

AND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, EVERYTHING ***CHANGED.***

I WASN'T ***PREPARED*** FOR IT.

AND MY SISTER... WHAT SHE'S BECOME.

ALL BECAUSE OF ME.

AND IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU THAT SHE ***STOPPED.***

I DO BELIEVE SHE WAS ONLY DOING WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS ***RIGHT.***

I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT.

IT'S VERY ***HARD*** TO LOSE SOMEONE YOU LOVE.

AND IT'S QUITE EASY TO ***LOSE YOURSELF*** WHEN YOU DO.

WELCOME, ***WANDERING SPIRITS,*** TO THE ***JUDGMENT HALL!***

AH! THE ARCHITECT OF THE CONVERGENCE HAS ARRIVED!
YOU LEFT US A REAL MESS TO CLEAN UP.
I'M SORRY. IT WASN'T INTENTIONAL.
WE ARE AWARE.
I SEE YOU SUCCESSFULLY REASSEMBLED YOUR BOOK. IMPRESSIVE!
I COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT HER.
GRAB!
BOOK?
I HAVE NONE. IT WAS DESTROYED.
PITY. YOU WILL HAVE TO STAY BEHIND.
BUT SHE'S WITH ME!
AND SHE MUST STAY BEHIND. THE RULES ARE CLEAR.
IT'S ALL RIGHT. THERE'S NOTHING FOR ME IN THERE ANYWAY.
COME, THE REALMKEEPERS ARE EAGER TO SEE YOU.
GOOD LUCK!
IF IT WORKS OUT, I'LL BE HAPPY FOR YOU.
IF IT DOESN'T, I'LL BE HERE FOR YOU.
DON'T GO FAR.

LET US COMMENCE THE JUDGMENT PROCEEDINGS OF ERIK LEROUX.

UPON REVIEW OF HIS LIFE, SEVERAL POINTS ARE CLEAR.

HE WAS THE VICTIM OF MURDER.

BUT HE WAS THE PERPETRATOR OF MANY.

HE WAS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF CHEMICALS AND SCIENTIFIC ALTERATION.

BUT HE--

IF I COULD INTERRUPT...

THERE'S NO NEED TO CONTINUE, MY ***GUILT*** IS WELL UNDERSTOOD.

I WISH TO USE MY TIME BEFORE YOU TO ***ADVOCATE*** FOR SOMEONE WHO ***DOES*** DESERVE ***BETTER.***

SOMEONE ***I KILLED.***

HER NAME IS ***ELIZABETH.***

HER BOOK WAS DESTROYED, BUT I CAN VOUCH FOR HER ***INNOCENCE.***

I ***BEG*** YOU, DON'T ***PUNISH*** HER FOR MY ACTIONS.

LET HER INTO THE ***SACRED REALM.***

HE IS SELFLESS.

HE EXHIBITS A CAPACITY TO REFORM.

YOU PRESENT AN INTRIGUING DILEMMA, MR. LEROUX.

PERHAPS OUR ANTIQUATED PROCESS IS IN NEED OF REVIEW.

GIVEN THE SEVERITY OF YOUR MISDEEDS, WE CANNOT PERMIT YOU INTO THE SACRED REALM.

HOWEVER, WE HEREBY BESTOW UPON YOU THE STATUS AND PRIVILEGES OF A SPIRIT GUIDE, LIKE THOSE OF OUR CLERICAL.

YOU SHALL BE TASKED WITH SEEKING OUT OTHERS IN THIS SPIRIT REALM WHO HAVE BEEN OVERLOOKED BY OUR PROCEDURE AND ARE WORTHY OF ANOTHER CHANCE.

THIS PROCESS IS NOW ADJOURNED.

AS FOR ELIZABETH, YOUR REQUEST IS GRANTED.

YOUR HONORS, GIVEN HIS NEW DESIGNATION, IS HE PERMITTED TO ***ACCOMPANY*** ELIZABETH TO THE SACRED REALM AND BID HER FAREWELL?

HE IS INDEED PERMITTED. YOU MAY ASSIST HIM.

YOU ARE WELCOME.

ERIK!

THEY JUST TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED!

HOW DID YOU DO IT?!

I ONLY DID WHAT WAS ***RIGHT.***

THE REST FOLLOWED.

I TOLD YOU THERE WAS STILL A ***CHANCE.***

IF YOU WILL BOTH COME WITH ME, THE ***STAIRWAY*** TO THE SACRED REALM IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER.

FOLLOW THIS PATH TO THE VERY TOP AND YOU WILL REACH THE ***TRANSITIONAL DOORWAY.***

I WILL BE WAITING HERE FOR YOUR RETURN, ERIK.

RETURN? AREN'T YOU COMING WITH ME?

SADLY, I'M ONLY HERE TO SEE YOU ***OFF.***

MY HOPE IS THAT ***KATRINA*** WILL LOOK AFTER YOU NOW.

HOW CAN THAT BE POSSIBLE? I DON'T WANT TO GO WITHOUT YOU.

I'VE BEEN GIVEN A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A ***REAL DIFFERENCE*** BACK THERE.

YOU WERE THE ***SPARK,*** BUT YOU CAN'T BE THE END.

I HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO TO TRULY MAKE THINGS ***RIGHT.***

SPEAKING OF MAKING THINGS RIGHT, ***PROMISE*** ME ONE THING...

...WHEN YOU ARE ABLE, USE THAT ***GHOSTIFIER*** DEVICE WE SAW.

VISIT YOUR ***SISTER.*** SHE NEEDS TO SPEAK TO YOU.

IF YOU SAY SO.

OH, ERIK!

MY LOVE!

I ALWAYS KNEW YOU WOULD MAKE IT BACK!

COME, WE HAVE SO MUCH TO DISCUSS.

KATRINA, I...

...I'M AFRAID I CAN ONLY STAY FOR A *MOMENT.*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I WAS GIVEN A SPECIAL *EXCEPTION.* BUT NOT A POSITIVE JUDGMENT.

BEING WITH YOU AGAIN IS ALL I'VE EVER WANTED.

BUT I'M NO LONGER *CONCERNED* WITH MY OWN WISHES.

KATRINA, I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO ELIZABETH.

SHE WAS A *VICTIM* OF *MY EXPERIMENTS* BUT HAS BECOME VERY *DEAR* TO ME IN OUR TIME TOGETHER SINCE THEN.

I MADE A PROMISE TO *TAKE CARE* OF HER.

I ASK THAT YOU HELP ME KEEP THAT PROMISE NOW.

OF COURSE I WILL. I'M *KATRINA.*

ELIZABETH. I FEEL AS IF I ALREADY KNOW YOU.

I ALSO ASK THAT YOU BOTH SEEK OUT ANYONE HERE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY *MY ACTIONS.*

I'LL BE DOING THE SAME IN THE SPIRIT REALM, WITH THE INTENTION OF *GUIDING* EVEN MORE UP HERE TO YOU.

WHAT SHOULD WE SAY TO THEM?

YOU WOULD KNOW BETTER THAN I.

JUST MAKE SURE THEY KNOW THEY'RE *NOT ALONE.*

ERIK, EVEN FOR JUST A MOMENT, LET ME SEE THE *REAL YOU.*

ONE *LAST* TIME.

NOW THAT I KNOW THEY'LL BE OUR LAST, I STRUGGLE TO FIND THE WORDS.

THEY'LL COME TO YOU IN TIME.

BUT IT WILL BE *TOO LATE.*

FOR ME, YES. BUT NOT FOR *YOU.*

SPEAK THEM ANYWAY. IT HELPS.

I'VE SPOKEN TO YOU MORE IN MY TIME HERE THAN I EVER DID IN PERSON.

I DON'T NEED ANY WORDS. JUST THIS...

GOODBYE, MY LOVE.

GOODBYE, MY FRIEND.

YOU SERVED US WELL.

BUT A *NEW CHAPTER* IS UPON US.

FLICK

SSSSSS...

ERIK LEROUX

I TRUST YOU'LL APPRECIATE THE ***ADDITIONAL SPACE*** HERE, HARUSPEX.

WE HAVE MUCH WORK AHEAD IF THIS PLACE IS TO BECOME LIVABLE AGAIN.

I LIKE THIS VERSION OF YOU FAR MORE.

ELIZABETH! I THOUGHT I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN.

YOU ONLY CAN BECAUSE I'M IN A ***SAFER PLACE*** NOW.

ERIK MADE SURE OF IT.

YOU MUST BE SO ***ASHAMED*** OF ME.

IT'S ***MY FAULT*** YOU RAN OFF ***ALONE.*** MY FAULT YOU WERE ***KILLED.***

NOT A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT THINKING OF THAT NIGHT.

YET I CAN'T EVEN RECALL WHAT YOU'RE REFERRING TO.

OUR ARGUMENT?

THE NIGHT YOU WERE TAKEN?

YOU'VE BEEN *TORTURING* YOURSELF OVER SOMETHING I WASN'T EVEN AWARE OF.

I'M ONLY NOW REGAINING THE MEMORIES OF OUR LIFE TOGETHER.

AND IT WAS *WONDERFUL.*

DON'T GO!

I'LL NEVER BE FAR.

ZKSSH!

I SUPPOSE THAT'S *US* NOW, MY PET.

"THOSE WHO NEAR THE CRESCENT MANOR, PERCHED BENEATH THE CRESCENT MOON, CALL THE *SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS,* CAUSING THEM TO MEET THEIR *DOOM.*"

MY DEAREST KATRINA...

...THOUGH OUR TIME TOGETHER WAS BUT A DISTANT DROP IN THE SEA OF MY LIFE...

...ITS RIPPLES CONTINUE TO *ECHO* THROUGH EVERY CORNER OF MY SOUL.

WHEN WE FIRST MET, YOU GAVE ME *HOPE.*

AND EVERY TIME WE WERE TORN APART, THAT HOPE *REMAINED.*

IT KEPT ME *ALIVE.*

IT BROUGHT ME TO *KILL.*

IT DROVE ME *MAD.*

MY HEAD LONGS FOR A TIME WHERE WE NEVER MET.

BUT MY HEART BURSTS AT THE VERY THOUGHT OF HAVING NEVER FELT THE WAY YOU MADE ME FEEL.

THOUGH I WILL FOREVER BE *HAUNTED* BY THIS IMPOSSIBLE HOPE...

...I *WELCOME* THAT HAUNTING SPIRIT TO *BRIGHTEN* THE SHADOWS THAT NOW DARKEN MY EXISTENCE WITHOUT YOU.

HELP!

THEY'RE AFTER ME!

I'VE GOT YOU!

THANK YOU!

AT FIRST I THOUGHT YOU WERE ANOTHER ONE OF THEM.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I HAVE YOU TO THANK FOR MY APPEARANCE.

SAY IT ISN'T SO...DID WE KNOW EACH OTHER?

YOU HAVE A LOT TO CATCH UP ON, DOCTOR.

I'D SUGGEST YOU START READING.

DOCTOR? IT WOULD SEEM I DO.

H.P.

WHAT'S THAT SONG YOU'RE PLAYING? IT'S ***BEAUTIFUL.***

SOMETHING I WROTE IN ANOTHER LIFETIME.

FOR A LOVE I WILL NEVER SEE...

... BUT WILL NEVER BE WITHOUT.

THE END

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